



# LAND TRUST NEWS

Volume 23, No. 1 March 2021

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7:00 PM, March 14, 2021  
Virtual by Zoom

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**Ken Warchol**

*The Role of the Honeybee in our Environment*

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**Be Sure to Visit ACT's  
Website:**

[www.actonconservationtrust.org](http://www.actonconservationtrust.org)



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## Acton Conservation Trust

### A Non-Profit Land Trust

- Board of Trustees
- Susan Mitchell-Hardt  
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  - Joe Cooney  
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  - Hart Millett  
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  - David Hardt  
*Clerk*
  - Carol Dombrowski  
Jody Harris

Acton Conservation Trust  
P.O. Box 658  
Acton, MA 01720

**Did you remember to  
renew your  
membership for  
2021?**

To many who have already done so, thanks for renewing your support. For those who have yet to renew, please use the form on page 5 of this newsletter to keep your membership active.

March, 2021

Dear Friends and Acton Conservation Trust Members:

Despite the tribulations of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's been a great year for open space – both enjoying it more than ever and preserving it. We all have seen the increased use of our trails, with more people than ever discovering the beauty of Acton's woods and fields. But it was also a big year for preservation, with the purchase of the Piper Lane property to complete the preservation of Great Hill. Not only was this the culmination of an effort started by ACT nearly 15 years ago, it was a shining example of what we call "Neighborhood Advocacy".

Neighborhood advocacy involves being aware of open space preservation opportunities in your neighborhood, and working with ACT and the Town (typically with the Open Space Committee) to explore options. In some cases neighbors work with landowners to purchase and resell the land, as was the case for Wright Hill, or provide early information about development actions and then advocate for preservation, as was the case with the Central Street parcel recently added to the Heath Hen Meadow Brook area. Neighborhood advocacy also occurred when neighbors, as well as people from all over town, contributed funds (via ACT fundraising efforts) to help purchase these lands.

In the case of Great Hill, the South Acton Neighborhood Association (SANA) was specifically organized to advocate for the preservation of this critical parcel, and in the end it was the sustained efforts of these neighbors that turned the tide. They identified the critical nature of this parcel to the future of South Acton, and made the case for preservation and not development to both the citizenry in general and the Select Board in particular. These efforts helped convince the property owner to sell to the Town, and the purchase was finalized at the Special Town Meeting on September 8, where I will always remember casting my vote at the COVID-safe outdoor venue that seemed more like a drive in movie theater than a formal meeting!

Finally, I was extremely gratified by the more than 120 "neighbors" (town-wide) who contributed to a campaign run by ACT that raised \$60,000 to help offset the cost of the purchase. It was not only an amazing outpouring of support, but one that took place over three short weeks before Town Meeting. Thank you all for your continued support of ACT and our mission to preserve the beautiful open spaces we treasure now more than ever.

Sincerely,

Susan Mitchell-Hardt

The Acton Conservation Trust is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that can hold permanent conservation easements, accept gifts of land, accept tax-deductible gifts to be used for open space preservation and purchase land for conservation purposes. We also provide education to landowners about various options for preservation. We work in concert with the Town of Acton and other local conservation organizations to maximize the amount of protected property. ACT is one of more than 150 such organizations in Massachusetts and is a member of the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition and the national Land Trust Alliance.

More information is available at [ActonConservationTrust.org](http://ActonConservationTrust.org) or by emailing [info@actonconservationtrust.org](mailto:info@actonconservationtrust.org)

# A Great Success: Land Acquisition at Great Hill

Great Hill is an oasis of open space and trails in the heart of Acton. Its magnificent open field and pond with surrounding woods and trails is an unbroken piece of rural splendor in the middle of historic South Acton. Most of the land surrounding the Hill is owned by the Town of Acton, but there remained one key parcel – the land behind 4 Piper Lane. ACT has been in contact with the owners for nearly 15 years about purchasing the land for conservation, and it is a perfect complement to the Gaebel Land, which was purchased by the Town with CPA funds in 2009. (ACT holds a permanent conservation restriction (CR) on this parcel.)

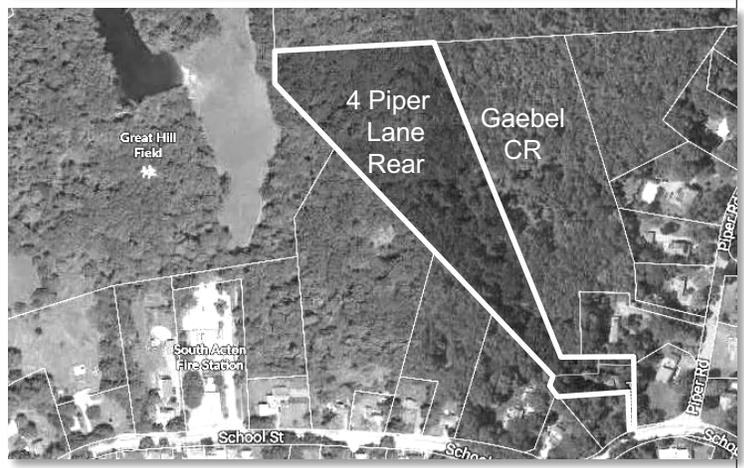
The Piper Lane parcel was highly vulnerable to development, and indeed a high density development using most of the 5.6 acre parcel had been proposed and was going through an extensive approval process. However, the owner then offered to sell the parcel to the Town. A purchase agreement was negotiated and a proposal was made by the Select Board to the Community Preservation Committee to fund the purchase. This proposal was approved and the subsequent Town Meeting Article passed nearly unanimously at the Special Town Meeting on September 8, 2020.

## The Campaign for Great Hill

To help offset some of the purchase price, in mid-August, ACT committed to a private fundraising campaign with a goal of \$60,000. Although this campaign lasted less than a month, we met this goal, and were pleased to present a gift to the Town for this purchase. This amount came from more than 120 donors and included a \$20,000 donation from ACT's land acquisition fund.

## Next Steps

As with the Gaebel land, this parcel will be subject to a CR (a requirement of any purchase with CPA funds) and ACT will hold the CR. We have begun the process by drafting a Baseline Documentation Report (BDR) that captures the state of the land when purchased. At the same time, the process of drafting the formal CR, which essentially states that no development of the land can ever occur, has been started. With these two documents, ACT will begin the annual monitoring process to be sure the land stays open in perpetuity.



## ACT Welcomes Two New Trustees

At the virtual 2020 Annual Meeting we welcomed two new Trustees to ACT - Carol Dombrowski and Jody Harris. Carol has served as the president of the Friends of the Acton Libraries for some 20 years, but this role dovetails neatly with her belief that, as Robert Swan said, "the biggest obstacle to saving the planet is the belief that someone else will do it." She hopes to bring writing skills, as well as experience working with volunteers and committees, to the goal of protecting

the environment through preserving open space.

Jody has worn various hats over the years, including scout leader, engineer, science teacher and outdoor activities organizer. She can often be found walking in the woods, paddling along a waterway or planning her next meal. Since joining the Board she has initiated a well visited Instagram page and organized two ACTivities.

Both Carol and Jody have quickly learned the ropes of monitoring CR's and look forward to the Spring season.

# ACT Service Day

## Attacking Invasives at the Arboretum and Donald CR

On October 18, 2020, ACT sponsored a Service Day to remove invasive species at the Donald Conservation Restriction (CR) in the Acton Arboretum. Twenty-seven volunteers worked for several hours removing invasive plants from the trail through the Donald CR toward the adjacent property owned privately. They removed huge piles of bittersweet, glossy buckthorn, multiflora rose, honeysuckle and burning bush. Most volunteers commented that using a weed wrench was incredibly satisfying!

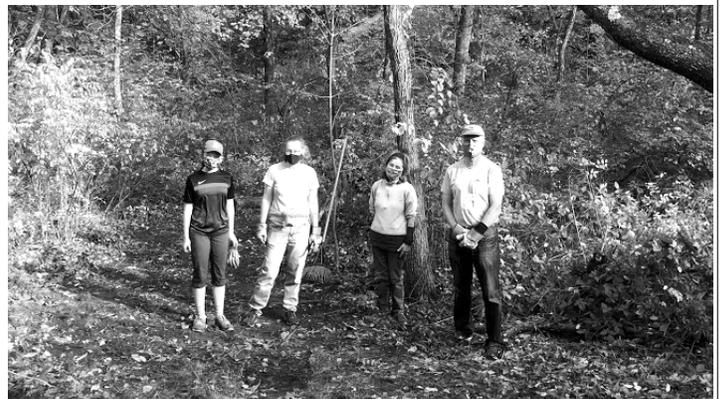
Because of COVID-19 we assigned family groups a specific length along the trail, and volunteers were required to wear masks. Girls and boys from BSA Troops 1 and 12 were well represented. Many thanks again to all participants for your help!



Before: Happy volunteers in the thick of invasive honeysuckle



ACT Trustee Jody Harris gives last minute instructions to our volunteers



After: Happy and tired volunteers in the newly cleared trail

## History of ACT, Part 1 Our First Big Project - Failure Leads to Success

The Acton Conservation Trust, which was founded in 1965, was re-focused on Land Protection in 1998, under the leadership of Karen O'Neill and Susan Mitchell-Hardt. With a Board of Trustees that included Brewster Conant, Carol Holley, Jamie Eldridge, Will Hill, Morene Bodner and Dave Hardt, we kicked off this mission with a huge project. We had learned that a number of independently owned parcels in North Acton by Robbins Mill Pond, totaling 238 acres, were being consolidated under one owner and offered for development. ACT contacted the new owner to see if a conservation buy was possible and this began a nearly two-year process to bring this project to Town Meeting for purchase. With help from many ACT members, The Sudbury Valley Trustees and the Trust for Public Land, an Article was presented at the 1999 Town Meeting to purchase the entire parcel for \$7.9M, using \$6.9M in town funds, and \$1M that would be raised by ACT. We campaigned hard for the "Robbins Mill Pond Land" (RMPL or *rump*le) purchase and the Town voted overwhelmingly at Spring Town Meeting to purchase the land, however, we lost the subsequent override election. We always knew such a purchase was a long shot, and one of the many lessons learned is that outright purchases using municipal funds on an *ad hoc* basis is very difficult, politically, fiscally and emotionally.

Most of all this made clear that we needed a dedicated funding source for open space acquisition. At about this time Westford and Stow had adopted the Community Preservation Act (CPA) in its first year. They also recognized the importance of having a funding source to acquire open space, as well as for historic preservation and community housing. The Town of Acton appointed a CPA Advisory Committee, in which ACT President Susan Mitchell-Hardt participated, and it was evident to her that adopting the CPA was critical to ACT's core mission of land preservation. Susan (acting as a private citizen, not an officer of ACT) chaired the Ballot Question Committee, and after much campaigning Town Meeting voted near unanimously to adopt the CPA legislation. Again the challenge was to win at the override election, and thanks to our political experience gained in the RMPL override election we campaigned just as hard for that vote and came away with a victory!

The rest is, as they say, history. Thanks to ACT's landowner outreach program combined with a preservation ecosystem that has developed with the Open Space Committee, Sudbury Valley Trustees, and the Community Preservation Committee, we have since preserved 11 parcels in all corners of Acton. Stayed tuned for more details in the History of ACT Part 2!!

# Acton Conservation Trust Business

## 2020 in Review

Feb 15 - Winter Wildlife Tracking Walk -Heath Hen Meadow Conservation Land.  
 Mar 15 - ACT Annual Meeting, - Held by Zoom – Speaker deferred to next year; elected new Trustees, Carol Doblewski and Jody Harris.  
 Mar 28- The annual Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference, was canceled owing to COVID-19. Several Board members attended online.  
 Apr - Monitored 7 Conservation Restrictions.  
 May - Produced and posted a virtual walk of Grassy Pond with naturalist and storyteller, Boot Boutwell.  
 Jun – Produced and posted a virtual bird walk of Nagog Pond Conservation Land led by Rita Grossman, Boxborough Birder and President of Boxborough Conservation Trust.  
 Jun 24 - ACT debuts new Instagram page courtesy of new Trustee, Jody Harris  
 Jul - Produced and posted a video of Boot Boutwell’s “Poems and Stories” taken at Grassy Pond.  
 Aug - ACT Initiates “Campaign for Great Hill” to help fund Piper Lane Land.  
 Sep 8 - Town of Acton Special Town Meeting, to vote on Acquisition of Piper Lane Properties by Great Hill- it passed overwhelmingly.  
 Sept 20 – Presented Town a \$60,000 gift from Great Hill Campaign to help purchase the Piper Lane properties.  
 Oct 18 - ACT Community Service Day – Invasives removal at the Acton Arboretum & Donald Conservation Restriction.  
 Nov - Trained two new trustees (Jody and Carol) to be CR Monitors.  
 Nov 8 - Sponsored an “Autumn Nature Walk of Piper Lane Land” at Great Hill Conservation Area with COVID restricted attendance.

## Goodbye to Trustee Linda McElroy

The ACT Board reluctantly accepted the resignation of long-time Trustee and former Vice President Linda McElroy. Linda made huge contributions to ACT during her eight years as trustee. Not only is she a fountain of knowledge and wisdom, but she initiated and spearheaded ACT’s first two Community Service days and coordinated CR monitoring. Before ACT she served on the Conservation Commission, founded the Land Stewardship Committee, created Trail Through Time at Nashoba Brook Conservation Land, and is a key player in Friends of Pine Hawk. We are grateful for her service to the ACT and will miss her steady hand and wise counsel.



## Holley Conservation Volunteer of the Year

The ACT Board voted unanimously to present the 2021 Carol Holley Conservation Volunteer award to Bruce Rachman. The award is given each year to the person who best exemplifies Carol’s shining example of community involvement in protecting the environment.

Bruce hit the ground running shortly after moving to Acton in 2009 and joined the Land Stewardship Committee. Since then he has built all manner of bridges: two at the Acton Arboretum, the highlight being the China Bridge & trail, as well as a wheelchair friendly bridge at the Wildflower Garden. His other bridges can be seen at Guggins Brook, on the Green and Blue trail over the Assabet River, at the Pencil Factory, and on Nashoba Brook.

In addition, he created a handicap-accessible campsite at Camp Acton, complete with boardwalk and fire ring. These projects have often also been made possible by CPC grants, as well with the help of Eagle Scouts. Bruce will be given the award at the 2021 Annual Meeting.



## Notice of 2021 Annual Meeting of Members

Please note that the 2021 Annual Meeting of members of the Acton Conservation Trust (ACT), a Massachusetts non-profit corporation, will be held on Sunday, March 14 at 7:00 PM on Zoom. We will convene the brief business portion of the meeting, where members will be asked to:

- Vote to re-elect Joe Cooney, David Hardt,, Susan Mitchell-Hardt Jody Harris, Carol Doblewski and Hart Millett as Trustees, each to serve until the 2022 Annual Meeting and as otherwise provided in ACT’s Bylaws.
- Vote to re-elect David Hardt as Clerk, and re-elect Hart Millett as Treasurer of ACT, each to serve until the 2021 Annual Meeting.
- Hear and comment on the Treasurer’s Report and committee reports of 2020 activities, and to act upon such other business as may come before the meeting.

To register for this virtual meeting please visit <https://forms.gle/WTGbdQiuoXCY7rxH6>

2019-2020 Financial Statements	FY 2019	FY 2020
<b>Statement of Income and Expenses</b>		
<b>INCOME</b>		
Dues & Donations	\$19,548	\$26,175
Campaign Donations		\$40,769
Interest Income	\$70	\$6
Miscellaneous Income	\$1,800	\$0
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$21,418</b>	<b>\$66,950</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
<b>Operating Expenses</b>		
Software Licenses	\$421	\$421
Mass Mailing	\$1,423	\$2,650
Grants	\$0	\$0
Misc. Fees	\$2,942	\$355
Services	\$1,452	\$1,775
Organization Memberships	\$550	\$675
Insurance	\$4,709	\$1,720
Miscellaneous Expenses	\$538	\$2,728
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$12,035</b>	<b>\$10,324</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>		
Misc. Fees	\$60	\$35
Land Acquisition Expense *	\$0	\$61,800
Legal Services	\$0	\$0
<b>Total Other Expenses</b>	<b>\$60</b>	<b>\$61,835</b>
	\$12,094	\$72,159
<b>NET INCOME</b>	<b>\$9,324</b>	<b>-\$5,209</b>
<b>Balance Sheet</b>		
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Checking/Savings/Investment**	\$274,064	\$316,968
Land	\$19,777	\$19,777
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$293,841</b>	<b>\$336,744</b>
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>		
Liabilities	\$0	0
Equity	\$293,841	\$336,744
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>	<b>\$293,841</b>	<b>\$336,744</b>

\* FY 2020 Includes \$60,000 Gift for Piper Lane Land Purchase

\*\* Includes funding for CR stewardship



# ACTON CONSERVATION TRUST

## 2021 Membership & Renewal Application

Join the many other townspeople who support our efforts to preserve open space in Acton.

*Among other uses, your donations help ACT pursue opportunities to acquire land and conservation easements, and provide stewardship of these lands. Your support also helps us stay current on Land Trust developments through key publications and workshops.*

- If you are not yet a Member of ACT (or have not yet renewed your membership for 2021), please join us!
- If you are already a Member for 2021 please pass this newsletter on to a friend who might be interested.

To renew or join please visit: [actonconservationtrust.org](http://actonconservationtrust.org)

### ***Suggested levels of support :***

Or mail this form to:

Acton Conservation Trust  
P.O. Box 658  
Acton, MA 01720

- |                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| ___ Individual \$25 | ___ Protector \$250 |
| ___ Family \$50     | ___ Supporter \$500 |
| ___ Friend \$100    | ___ Patron \$1,000  |
| ___ Seniors \$15    | ___ Other \$_____   |
- & Students

**Name:**

**Address:**

**Phone:**

**Email:**

*Your email address allows ACT to keep you informed about news & local meetings related to conservation & open space preservation.*

*Please make your check payable to  
**Acton Conservation Trust***

Please contact me about how I can get more involved!

nl2021

### *ACTivities, 2020 – COVID-Style\**

#### **May 13 - A Walk by Grassy Pond**

Winchester naturalist and storyteller Boot Boutwell narrated a delightful mid-Spring walk at Grassy pond. We learned about numerous plants along the way including star flower, Solomon's seal, Canada mayflower, princess pine, highbush blueberry, skunk cabbage, various ferns, witch-hazel and sweet pepper bush. We also heard about the magnificent American beech tree and the poetry of violets.

#### **Spring 2020 - Stories and Poems at Grassy Pond**

During his walks of Grassy Pond last Spring, Boot recited a number of poems and told stories evoked by the plants. Watch this video to learn about "sailor's delight" and Thoreau's use for skunk cabbage leaves. He details the Chippewa "remedy for craziness" which involves inhaling hot blueberry flower scent. Boot testifies that since he tried it he is "much better than he used to be..." We also heard recitations from Wendell Berry "Peace of Wild Things", Edna St. Vincent Millay "First Fig" and from Kalidasa, "The Salutation of the Dawn".

#### **May 31 - The Birds of Grassy Pond**

We spent a glorious late Spring morning at the upper part of the Grassy Pond land with Boxborough Birder (and Boxborough Conservation Trust President) Rita Gibes Grossman. Rita took us from meadow to woods, to the pond and back again, along the way seeing and hearing numerous birds. These include the chipping sparrow, pine warbler, goldfinch, cedar waxwing, indigo bunting, bluebird, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, cardinal, red-bellied woodpecker, eastern wood peewee, ovenbird, Baltimore oriole, grackle, red-winged blackbird, tree swallow, barn swallow, yellow throated warbler, mourning dove and cowbird.

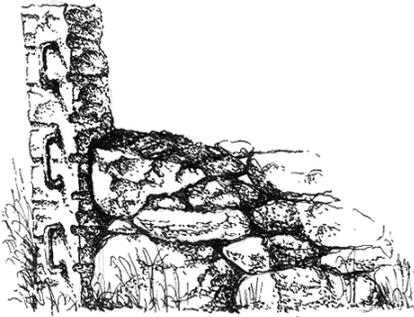


\*You can find these in the video tab of our Facebook page.

Acton Conservation Trust  
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Acton, MA 01720

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ACT Annual Meeting Guest Speaker:

**Ken Warchol**

"The Bee Whisperer"

***The Role of the Honeybee in our Environment***



Kenneth Warchol, a veteran beekeeper, will share his knowledge in a narrated visual presentation. You will travel right inside a beehive to better understand the mysterious social insect and the role that it plays in humanity's survival on Earth. Learn about the challenges honeybees face in our environment and find out how we can help this insect that is essential to our own survival. Ken Warchol became involved with the Massachusetts Federation of Beekeepers in the 1970s.

Because of his unique talent with bees he is considered by many as the *bee whisperer*. He is a 6th generation caretaker of bees; his family's practice originated in Poland in the 1840s. In 1999, Ken was chair of the 100th Anniversary Celebration of the Worcester County Bee Association, the oldest county beekeeping association in the country. He has continued to speak to a wide variety of interest groups and beekeeping associations throughout New England mostly about honeybee abnormalities and disease and has published several articles in the American Bee Journal.

**Save The Date**  
**ACT Annual Meeting**  
**Sunday, March 14, 2021**  
**7:00 PM**  
**Virtual by Zoom**

Please Register at:

<https://forms.gle/WTGbDQiuoXCY7rxH6>

**ACTON CONSERVATION TRUST, Inc.**  
**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

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